THE INVENTION OF TRADITION?

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A conference organised by the English historical journal *Past and present* (1978) resulted in the publication of a highly influential collection of essays – *The invention of tradition*, edited by eminent historians, Eric John Hobsbawm and Terence Osborn Ranger. Originally published in 1983, a first paperback edition followed in 1984, and since then the book has been reprinted on a yearly basis, with a second edition coming out in 1992 (which has since been reprinted yearly). An examination of academic citations reveals that this book has become to be regarded as a key text in the study of modern political and social history (both within historical studies and the social sciences).[1] Its central thesis has been accepted almost axiomatically. It is commonplace to find references that state that traditions are, or have been, universally invented, referring to the Hobsbawm and Ranger collection as an unchallenged source, that apparently does not require further qualification. Perhaps this is most evident in the study of national commemoration rituals. Recent contributions to this currently popular field of study reveal that *The invention of tradition* is still referred to as an uncontested authority.[2] This article proposes to question this orthodoxy. A critique of the *Invention of tradition* thesis conducted through a general discussion on the nature of traditions and their transmission is then followed by a more specific, brief reappraisal of a relevant episode in modern Irish history.

Invented traditions

In the introduction to the volume, Hobsbawm informs the reader that '"Traditions" which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.' He clarifies his use of terminology by stating –

> 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.

The nature of invention is further explained –

> ...insofar as there is such reference to a symbolic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.[3]

Throughout the book, this claim is then persuasively demonstrated through reference to various case studies in modern history, including contributions on the romantic reconstruction of the Welsh past (Prys Morgan), the public image of the British monarchy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (David Cannadine), Victorian India (Bernard S. Cohn), and colonial Africa (Terence Ranger). Arguably, the most impressive essay is Hugh Trevor-Roper's startling exposé on the fabrication of Highland tradition in Scotland, beginning with James Macpherson's eighteenth century Ossianic forgeries, and concluding with the so-called Sobieski Stuarts and the nineteenth century 'tartanization' of

supposedly-authentic Clan costume.

Reading through these well-written articles has an enlightening effect: as the vulnerabilities of traditions are exposed, the reader is, to paraphrase Immanuel Kant, liberated from the 'self-incurred tutelage' of perceptions of the past, which are shown to be largely modern manipulations. The *coup de grâce* is delivered by Hobsbawm himself in the concluding essay on 'Mass-producing traditions: Europe, 1870-1914'. Here it is masterfully revealed that 'Once we are aware how commonly traditions are invented, it can easily be discovered that one period which saw them spring up with particular assiduity was in the thirty or forty years before the first world war.'[4] Focusing primarily on Western countries (including the United States), the heyday of the invention of political traditions is identified as the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, when the past was perpetually evoked and systematically reconstructed as a central part of the nation-building process, orchestrated by the emerging modern states and organised mass movements.

Tradition and invention

Convincing as it may seem, an analysis of the *Invention of tradition* thesis requires further interrogation of the key concepts employed. The essential characteristic of tradition, according to Hobsbawm, is invariance. He makes a clear distinction between 'tradition' and 'custom'. Accordingly, tradition is by nature described as unchanging, whereas custom upholds precedence as a basis for social continuity and is therefore characterised by 'flexibility in substance and formal adherence to precedent'. A further distinction is made with 'convention' and 'routine', which are described as invariant conduct with functions (and therefore justifications) that are technical rather than ideological. This results in a conceptualisation of tradition which is static and focuses more on symbols and the values they embody than on performances of ritual.

The use of the word 'tradition' in the English language was first noted in the fourteenth century and it carried with it from Latin (*traditio*) several meanings: delivery (into the hands of another), handing down of knowledge (through successive generations), and the passing down and instruction of a doctrine. All of these conveyed a notion of something handed down with a strong sense of respect and duty and, therefore, elicited powerful connotations relating to age-old, ceremony, duty, and reverence. However, it is worth noting another, almost forgotten, meaning of the Latin original, which referred to tradition as surrender or betrayal.[5] In this regard, tradition appears to have, already inbuilt into its very essence, an element of deceit. This may serve as a warning to the potentially illusive (and therefore perhaps elusive) nature of tradition. Another fundamental feature, which is apparent in the Latin uses of tradition, is the insistence on an act of passing on. Tradition is not merely an object but a process of transmission, which derives from the root word *tradere* – to give something to someone, particularly for safe keeping.

The emphasis on transmission as an intrinsic component of tradition is not merely a semantic observation, but calls attention to the inherently dynamic nature of tradition. Since traditions are not artefacts but cultural practices (that may involve the use of objects but impart on them symbolic meanings), the transmission of tradition cannot be described as a game of 'pass the parcel' in which remnants from the past are passed on intact, without any modification,

only to resurface in their original-archaic form. In that case traditions would typically appear to be anachronistic and out of place in a world that is inevitably different from that in which they were conceived. It follows that a crucial feature of tradition is adaptability, which facilitates (often transparently) modification to changing historical circumstances so as to maintain relevance and vitality. In this regard, traditions are not unlike customs and this challenges Hobsbawm's insistence on differentiation between the two, and hints to a possible misunderstanding of the nature of tradition on his behalf.

'Invention' is also a term which requires further scrutiny and its meaning cannot be taken as self evident. Once again, an etymological inquiry proves to be eye-opening. In Middle English 'invention' was taken to mean discovery (from the Latin *invenire* - contrive or discover).[6] In this regard, reference to the medieval cult of saints is especially illuminating, as discovered relics were referred to as 'invented'.[7] Scholarship has revealed that sanctified relics were not necessarily genuine and were often fabricated.[8] An attempt, for example, to assemble the alleged splinters of the true cross to be found ubiquitously throughout Christian Europe would probably result in enough timber to have derived from a whole forest. Nevertheless, the use of the term by contemporaries was not one of deception, but of invested faith in the authenticity of the discovery/invention. Exposing instances of circulation of misinformation is a worthy task for academic endeavour, yet the distinction of invention as invalidating criteria is not always historical. For example, Joep Leerssen has claimed that, when considering the discovery and subsequent publication of vernacular manuscripts – a phenomena that was widespread throughout Europe from the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century – insistence on the distinction between forgeries and authentic texts is not constructive. Indeed, even today scholars are often at a loss for conclusive linguistic tools to corroborate disputed evidence and for the people of the time the difference was practically meaningless.[9] Similarly, Anthony Smith raised the question: 'is the concept of an "invented tradition" only a retrospective judgement of the historian?'[10]

Recently, 'invention' has acquired a new-found currency in the titles of writings by post-modern and post-colonial thinkers. This vogue has not passed over Ireland, particularly in the work of innovative literary and cultural critics.[11] Beyond the implied academic hubris that evidently finds satisfaction in the belief that it is in the power of a writer to 'invent' an already existing entity, it appears that invention is used here in the sense of re-imagining, interpretation or, to borrow again from the cult of the saints, translation. Relics, once invented/discovered, were then 'translated' or relocated (in Latin: *translat-*; also *transferre* – transfer, as in move from one place to another). This point reiterates the importance of adaptability and helps to identify transformations, as materials from the past are appropriated and moved into new contexts. As always, the task of the historian cannot limit itself to pointing out that the subject is no longer situated in its 'original' environment, but must attempt to engage in re-contextualisation. The historical study of tradition is a potent reminder that history is essentially not only about dynamics of change but also equally about patterns of continuity.

The death of tradition?

An underlying presumption behind the Hobsbawm and Ranger thesis is that age-old (allegedly 'authentic') traditions passed away *en masse* with the advent of modernity and were substituted with newly-invented traditions. This belief is one of the tenets of the disciplines of folklore and anthropology, fields of study that emerged in the nineteenth century as attempts to document and preserve the vanishing traces of rapidly disappearing 'traditional societies'. This notion, described by American folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as a 'poetics of disappearance', was eloquently expressed by Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the pioneers of contemporary ethnography –

> Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity.[12]

However, the 'final hour' of tradition is a problematic concept for, as already mentioned, traditions are not static and unchanging, but essentially fluid and in a state of constant transition. While it cannot be denied that processes of modernisation and the introduction of technological advancements (most notably though industrialisation) posed a terminal threat to the traditional structures of rural societies and oral cultures, pinpointing the actual death or unrecoverable loss of traditions is a tricky exercise.[13]

David Gross's thought-provoking monograph on survivals of traditions from the past in the modern world – *The past in ruins* – is instructive on this issue. Gross's definition of tradition insists on an actual connection with the past: 'The term 'tradition' refers to a set of practices, a constellation of beliefs, or a mode of thinking that exists in the present, but was inherited from the past.'[14] Gross acknowledges that modernity (at least from the seventeenth century onwards) undermined many ancient traditions, yet he advocates a more sophisticated approach to the question of the passing away of these traditions. He demonstrates that, in addition to inventing traditions, states also engaged in absorbing surviving traditions and tapping into the symbolic power of defunct traditions, thus contributing to their rejuvenation.[15] He is especially sharp in his commentary on the relation of historians to tradition –

> Not all nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, but a good portion of it, falsely reconstructed the traditions of the past, and thereby fundamentally misrepresented them. By this I mean that the narratives many historians related did not focus on the traditions considered essential by the people who lived within them. Rather, the historians focused on the traditions that seemed most crucial to them as historians – and in deciding what was crucial they were, of course decisively shaped by their class, social position, and intellectual training. Consequently, the details of the traditions they recounted or the continuities they described were generally only those that the historians believed were worth remembering, and too often these had little or nothing to do with the communal traditions that the people *inside* of them would have wanted to preserve.[16]

This provocative statement bears testimony to the fact that, up until relatively recently, historiography was primarily concerned with political history and, in this light, traditions were considered worthy of study insofar as they were relevant to the larger narrative of emerging nationalisms. This recalls Hobsbawm's distinction between tradition and routine practices. The division may not be as obvious as it initially appears to be and perhaps it is a product of

the historian's preference, which pretends to determine what are 'legitimate' traditions, and therefore is not necessarily a valid historical definition. Certain subjects were examined in the context of the *Invention of tradition* thesis and others were not. The neglect of a large body of vernacular traditions, or so-called 'routine practices', which survived from older times but confronted by the challenges of modernity were forced to readapt themselves, indicates a serious lacunae in the Hobsbawm and Ranger project. Hobsbawm is in no way naïve in this regard and acknowledges the use of 'ancient materials' in constructing invented traditions –

> A large store of such materials is accumulated in the past of any society, and an elaborate language of symbolic practice and communication is always available. Sometimes, new traditions could be readily grafted on old ones, sometimes they could be devised by borrowing from the well-supplied warehouses of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortation – religion and princely pomp, folklore and freemasonry (itself an invented earlier tradition of great symbolic force).

Insisting that traditionalist and revivalist agendas did not preserve a 'living past' but unwittingly engaged in invention of tradition, Hobsbawm does however note a caveat to his argument: 'the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the 'invention of tradition'. Where the old ways are alive, traditions need neither be revived nor invented.'[17] These 'genuine', or un-invented, traditions, however, are not explored in the various collected essays and do not fall into consideration in the larger picture of the *Invention of tradition* paradigm, in which invented traditions are supposedly independent of any bona fide vestiges of the past.

As already mentioned, Hobsbawm, who has dedicated himself (among other projects) to the periodisation of modern history,[18] dated the 'golden age' of invented tradition as 1870-1914. This safely locates the crux of his thesis within a large body of supportive literature on the formation of the modern state. A prime example is Eugene Weber's seminal study of the demise of French rural-peasant society and its replacement with a modernised society upheld by the state. Unsurprisingly, Weber charted the practically wholesale disappearance of traditional folk practices to the years 1870-1914.[19] Belief in the existence of a thriving living tradition and the notion of its death around the end of the nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries is commonly accepted in contemporary historiography. It is one of the main assumptions behind the project of the innovative French historiographical school *Les lieux de mémoire*, spearheaded by Pierre Nora and involving the cream of contemporary French historians. Nora and his colleagues undertook a comprehensive study of the 'realms of memory', or to use a more old-fashioned term but strikingly similar in meaning – traditions, of France. Yet Nora maintains that 'living memory' (which can be read as living-authentic traditions) died around the turn of the nineteenth century and has been buried-deposited in specific *lieux de mémoire*, which, remarkably, often coincide with Hobsbawm's invented traditions.[20] Perhaps the use of the word 'death' is a bit harsh and should be refined to some sort of 'silent demise'; an examination of newspapers of the period will undoubtedly result in a failure to uncover an official notice of death or evidence of a funeral. However, did all these 'living' traditions really pass away?

Reinvention and reconstruction of traditions

The *Invention of tradition* model is strongly influenced by Hobsbawm's own ideology, echoing the Marxist belief in class manipulation. It also carries elitist and colonialist undertones. Fundamentally, it is an approach that maintains that the elite can dictate traditions to the susceptible 'masses' or 'natives', who will readily accept these impositions lock, stock, and barrel. The people's own traditions are too vulgar to have any real significance (and indeed the original sense of the word *vulgaris/vulgus* – common people – and the aristocratic connotations associated with it spring to mind). This unashamedly condescending way of thinking relates to what Anthony Smith has labelled the currently popular 'gastronomical' model of nation formation, which describes nations as products of social engineering that form Benedict Anderson's famous 'imagined communities'.[21] Yet, by suggesting an alternative model of nationalists as political archaeologists, who uncover residues of ethno-history which they then selectively reconstruct in new-contemporary settings, Smith has argued that there are limitations to the ability of nationalist elites to manipulate the 'common people' and introduce invented traditions.[22] Smith recognised that traditions inevitably are subject to popular reception and remarked –

> Traditions, myths, history and symbols must all grow out of the existing, living memories and beliefs of the people who are to compose the nation. Their popular resonance will be greater the more continuous with the living past they are shown to be.[23]

This turns the table on the *Invention of tradition* model and suggests an exploration of rediscovery (which recalls the original meaning of invention as discovery), reinterpretation, and reconstruction of tradition. This is not to say that new traditions are not introduced, but it follows that their ultimate success (in terms of being accepted and integrated into popular cultural practices) very much depends on their association with transformations of existing traditions. Furthermore, the reception of re-invented traditions is rarely a passive act. Examining transformations in local festival customs that were adopted as national traditions, folklorists Dorothy Noyes and Roger Abrahams have demonstrated the agency of local elites, who mediate hegemonic-metropolitan attempts to influence and reshape popular traditions.[24] As an illustration of the arguments raised, it would be enlightening to briefly examine what may appear to be a classic case of invention of tradition in modern Irish history.

Inventing 1798?

In the late nineteenth century, political culture in Ireland was deeply affected by the wave of public celebrations and erection of monuments for national heroes that swept across Europe, a phenomenon that Maurice Agulhon labelled, in a French context, 'statumania' [*statuomanie*].[25] Hobsbawm considered these European state commemorations to be a prominent expression of invented traditions and paid especial attention to the introduction of jubilees and ceremonial anniversaries.[26] Frameworks for Irish nationalist public commemoration were formalised during the centennial anniversary celebrations for the 1798 Rebellion, which were planned as a separatist demonstration to counter the 1897 Diamond Jubilee celebrations for Queen Victoria. Historical research has revealed the pivotal role of the centenary of 1798 in the

development of Irish nationalism. Despite intense squabbling and political intrigue, the centenary celebrations helped to bring together the various camps in Irish nationalism in the wake of the Parnell split. By May 1898 an amalgamated committee, involving parliamentarians and Fenians, was organising the year's major celebration in Dublin and co-ordinating the regional celebrations. The centenary provided platforms for all expressions of Irish nationalism, including republicans, socialists, Irish language revivalists, clerical leaders, and Gaelic sports enthusiasts. At the same time, the Irish Republican Brotherhood was the principal organiser of the centenary commemorations and this marked a turning point in Irish political history, signalling the emergence to prominence of radical nationalism (which Roy Foster has termed the 'new nationalism') that rejected parliamentarianism.[27]

The highlight of the centenary events was the great memorial ceremony in Dublin on 15 August 1898, which was attended by 100,000 people. A mass procession culminated in the dedication, by veteran Fenian John O'Leary, of the founding stone for a proposed monument in honour of United Irishman Theobald Wolfe Tone at the top of Grafton Street. On a local level, the centennial celebrations were organised by centenary clubs, chaired by prominent local nationalist politicians and dignitaries.[28] Numerous commemoration ceremonies were held throughout Ireland, which resulted in extensive dedication of statues in honour of the memory of 1798 rebels.[29] It appears that the centenary was essentially an exercise of mass-politicisation and invention of tradition, dictated from the centre to the periphery. However, historical research of 1798 has largely neglected the study of folklore traditions, examination of which may well sharpen public awareness of the popular reception of the centenary.[30]

Despite the concerted attempt by official nationalist commemoration to shape public historical consciousness, the centenary was not simply an exercise in manipulating and reconstructing popular memory. On a local level, social memory influenced the content of the centenary commemorations just as much it was influenced by propaganda from above. In the various arenas where the rebellion had taken place, visiting nationalist organisers from Dublin were arriving at a scene, which carried strong oral traditions of the events of 1798. These oral traditions had an impact on the centenary clubs, where local politicians, not only followed directions from the political centre in Dublin, but were also obliged to satisfy the demands of their constituency and accommodate representations of folk memory. In absence of sympathetic historical documentation, public commemorative acts at the periphery were frequently founded on the basis of existing local traditions. Folk memory was often preoccupied with traditions that were not directly infuenced by propaganda, emanated by public commemoration. The historical agenda of official commemoration was extremely limited, canonising a narrow pantheon of national heroes and constricted to select episodes in the history of the rebellion. In contrast, folk historiographies and vernacular rituals of commemoration recalled a richer variety of historical information on the people and events of 1798.

Rather than imagining a model of popular culture colonised from above through pageantry and rhetoric, it is more beneficial to construe the interaction between official commemoration and folklore in terms of dialogue and negotiations. Apart from memorising and repeating specifically composed songs and poems (such as the highly influential balladry of William Rooney),

information promulgated through commemorative celebrations rarely entered folklore unchanged. Furthermore, folklore often rejected external versions of history that did not correspond with the way the past was remembered by members of the local community. For example, the spirit of rapprochement and cordiality towards the French that characterised official commemorative ceremonies in 1898 was often treated cynically in folklore accounts from Connacht and the Midlands. Attempts from above to project appreciation of the French met with stubborn refusal to obliterate bitter memories of the Battle of Ballinamuck, which recalled how the French expeditionary force under General Jean Joseph Amable Humbert surrendered and ultimately deserted their Irish allies. Once accepted, the rhetoric accompanying public commemoration was usually adapted, re-interpreted, and transformed in social memory.[31] Therefore, it would be misguided to simply label the centenary of 1798 as a clear-cut case of invented traditions projected from Dublin and adopted by local communities throughout Ireland.

Reconsidering the invention of traditions

The invention of tradition was published at a time when a sword of Damocles was looming over British academic institutions in the form of impending governmental budget cuts. Sociologically, the essays in the book can be seen as an indirect political critique, undermining the validity of the 'traditional English values', which featured so prominently in Thatcherite-conservative rhetoric. Their arguments resonate with a similar tone to contemporary academic criticism of the booming preoccupation with heritage, on which Robert Hewison commented that: 'The growth of a heritage culture has led not only to a distortion of the past, but to a stifling of the culture of the present.'[32]

In contrast, Raphael Samuel criticised, what he regarded as 'heritage-baiting', and observed that since the publication of Hobsbawm and Ranger's collection –

> ...historians have become accustomed to thinking of commemoration as a cheat, something which ruling elites impose on the subaltern classes. It is a weapon of social control, a means of generating consensus and legitimising the *status quo* by reference to a mythologized version of the past. The heritage critics have followed suit, treating nostalgia as a contemporary equivalent of what Marxists used to call 'false consciousness' and existentialists 'bad faith'; they are at pains to show the deceptions involved in retrieval projects, and in the ways in which the received version of the past is sanitised so as to exclude any disturbing elements.

Samuel advocated a 'more ethnographic approach' which –

> ...might think of the invention of tradition as a process rather than an event, and memory, even in its silences, as something which people made for themselves. Rather than focusing on state theatricals of national myth, it might find it more profitable to focus on the perceptions of the past which find expression in the discriminations of everyday life.[33]

Hobsbawm and Ranger's collection made an important contribution to historiographical debate, however it cannot be treated as a full stop. Rather, it should be regarded as an opening statement in an ongoing discussion towards a deeper understanding of central issues such as historical consciousness, social memory, commemoration, myth, and tradition.

NOTES

[1] A cross search of the names of the contributors to the collection and the title keywords 'invention tradition' in The Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), presented online by the Institute for Scientific Research (http://www.heanet.ie), yields 694 references that appeared in indexed academic journals between 1990 and 2000.

[2] For example, see references to Hobsbawm and Ranger in Gillis, J. R. (ed.), *Commemorations. The politics of national identity* (Princeton, 1994).

[3] Hobsbawm, E., 'Introduction: Inventing traditions' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp 1-2.

[4] Hobsbawm, E., 'Mass-producing traditions: Europe, 1870-1914' in E. Hobsbawm, and T. Ranger (eds.), *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 263.

[5] *Oxford English dictionary*, XI, (Oxford, 1933), pp 225-6.

[6] *ibid*, V, (Oxford, 1933), pp 452-3.

[7] See, for example, Geary, P., 'Sacred commodities: the circulation of medieval relics', in A. Appudrai (ed.), *The social life of things. Commodities in cultural perspective.* (Cambridge. 1986), pp 169-91.

[8] For example, see Lowenthal D., 'Fabricating heritage', in *History and memory*, X, no. 1 (1998).

[9] Leerssen, J., 'Tradition and identity in nineteenth-century Ireland', paper delivered at the recent symposium 'Nineteenth-century studies in the twenty-first century' (Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland, Maynooth, 23 June 2000).

[10] Smith, A. D, 'The Nation: invented, imagined and reconstructed?' in M. Ringrose and A. J. Lerner (eds.), *Reimagining the nation* (Buckingham, 1993), p. 14.

[11] See for example, Kiberd, D., *Inventing Ireland* (London, 1995).

[12] Malinowski, B., *Argonauts of the western pacific*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1961), p. xv. See also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett B., 'Folklore's Crisis', in *Journal of American folklore*, XCI (1998), pp 281-327. In recent years, the romantic-sentimental tone of 'mourning the passing of traditional society' has come under much criticism. Renato Rosaldo has branded this trope as a form of 'imperialist nostalgia', since the ethnographer engaged in observing traditional life is inadvertently involved in ushering in 'modernity'. Rosaldo R., 'Imperialist nostalgia', in *Representations*, XXVI (1989), pp 107-22.

[13] For a discussion on the notion of 'the end of tradition', see Ó Gioláin, D., *Locating Irish folklore: tradition, modernity, identity* (Cork, 2000), pp 8-31.

[14] Gross reiterates this point by stating: 'In every bona fide tradition, there is always an element of the prescriptive.' Gross, D., *The past in ruins. Tradition and the critique of modernity* (Amherst, 1992), p. 8.

[15] While accepting that traditions can be fabricated, Gross notes that traditions can be 'propped up' with outside help, instrumentalised by the state, and commodified by the market. See *ibid*, pp 68-77. For an in-depth analysis of tradition that argues for the endurance of traditions from the past into the present, subject to patterns of change and stability, see Shils, E., *Tradition* (London and Boston, 1981).

[16] *ibid*, p. 82.

[17] Hobsbawm, E., 'Introduction: inventing traditions' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp 6 and 8.

[18] Over the past twenty-five years Hobsbawm has written a series of monumental modern history books under the titles, *The age of revolution 1789-1848* (London, 1973), *The age of capital 1848-1875* (London, 1975), *The age of empire 1875-1914* (London, 1987), and *The age of extremes 1914-1991* (London, 1994).

[19] Weber, E., *Peasants into Frenchmen. The modernization of rural France, 1870-1914* (London, 1977).

[20] Nora, P. (ed.), *Realms of memory. Rethinking the French past*, I-III (New York, 1996-8); see in particular, Nora, P., 'General Introduction: between memory and history' in *ibid*, I, pp 14-20.

[21] Anderson, B., *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 1983).

[22] Smith A. D., 'Gastronomy or geology? The role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations', in *Nations and nationalism*, I, no. 1 (1995), pp 3-23.

[23] Smith, A. D, 'The nation: invented, imagined and reconstructed?' in M. Ringrose and A. J. Lerner (eds.), *Reimagining the nation* (Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1993), p. 16. For a general discussion on the limitations and parameters of reconstructing representations of the past according to present needs, see Schudson, M., 'The present in the past versus the past in the present', in *Communication,* XI (1989), pp 105-13.

[24] Noyes, D. and Abrahams R. D., 'From calendar custom to national memory: European commonplaces', in D. Ben Amos and L. Weissberg (eds.), *Cultural memory and the construction of identity* (Detroit, 1999), p. 90.

[25] Agulhon, M., 'La statuomanie et l'histoire' in *Ethnologie Française*, III-IV (1978), pp 145-72.

[26] Hobsbawm, E., 'Mass-producing traditions: Europe, 1870-1914' in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 281.

[27] Collins P., 'The contest of memory: the continuing impact of 1798 commemoration', in *Éire-Ireland,* XXXIV, no. 2 (1999), pp 28-50; Kinsella A., 'Who feared to speak in 1898?' in *Journal of the Wexford historical society,* XVII (1998/9), pp 221-34; O'Keefe T., 'The 1898 efforts to celebrate the United Irishmen: the '98 centennial', in *Éire-Ireland,* XXIII, (1988) pp. 51-73; O'Keefe T., ''Who fears to speak of '98?': the rhetoric and rituals of the United Irishmen centennial, 1898', in *Éire-Ireland,* XXVII (1992), pp 67-91; and Paseta S., '1798 in 1898: the politics of commemoration', in *Irish Review,* XXII (1998), pp 46-53.

[28] Police reports counted 137 1798 clubs in December 1897. Crime Branch Special file 15200/S (National Archives of Ireland, 1898).

[29] Owens, G., 'Nationalist monuments in Ireland, c. 1870-1914: symbolism and ritual', in R. Gillespie and B. P. Kennedy (eds.), *Ireland: art into history* (Dublin, 1994), pp 103-17; and Hill, J., *Irish political sculpture: a history* (Dublin, 1998), pp 118-36.

[30] The following observations are based on a larger study of 1798 traditions documented in the archives of the Irish Folklore Commission, located in the Department of Irish Folklore at University College, Dublin. For a discussion on historiographical neglect of folklore sources, see Beiner, G., 'Orality lost: the archives of the Irish Folklore Collection and folk historiography of *Bliain na bhFrancach*' in H. Morgan (ed.), *Information, media and power through the ages* (Dublin, 2001), pp 222-44.

[31] For a more detailed discussion offering a reappraisal of the impact of the centenary based on the study of the social memory of the 1798 rebellion in the West of Ireland see Beiner, G., 'Negotiations of memory: Rethinking 1798 commemoration' in the *Irish Review*, 26, pp 60-70 (2000).

[32] Hewison, R., *The heritage industry. Britain in a climate of decline* (London, 1987), p. 10. For a recent discussion on the relationship of heritage and history which recalls the criticism of earlier scholars, see Lowenthal, D., *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history* (Cambridge, 1998).

[33] Samuel, R., *Theatres of memory, vol. I: past and present in contemporary culture* (London, 1994), pp 16-17.